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ABSTRACT

The panel which conducted this study was invited by the Florida Teaching Profession--National Education Association (NEA) and the NEA to assess the educational soundness of implementation of the Florida Accountability Act. The panel felt that the overall purpose of the accountability program was praiseworthy, but that the minimum competency testing program, with its mandatory standards for receiving a high school diploma, was seriously faulty because it took primary responsibilities away from the local school when the Florida Legislature had adopted a policy of school-based management. A strategy which the panel recommended for increased effectiveness would be to help schools identify their particular problems and assist each school in developing educational programs designed to attack those problems. Standards and requirements for promotion would then be based on more reasonable expectations. The panel also felt that an essential step for improvement would be to reconstruct the educational environment outside the school. Program inadequacies are attributed to excessive haste in instituting the program and failure to communicate with all participants. In addition, the panel felt that an attempt to have the public assume responsibility for out-of-school education should have been an early step in the accountability program. (Author/JAC)

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A Report of the Independent Evaluation Panel
under Contract to
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We are grateful to the many persons and groups who contributed to this study. Both oral and written testimonies were supplied by teachers, administrators, parents, and representatives of civic and professional organizations. The Florida Department of Education officials were cooperative in testifying and in supplying many pertinent printed documents. The Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and the National Education Association representatives supplied excellent logistical support, and their professionalism was of the highest order in providing information with the same objectivity as other persons and groups. We were greatly assisted by all. We think this clearly indicates the balance of professional concern and cooperation that exists throughout Florida regarding the continuing development of the state accountability system.

THE CONDITIONS OF THIS STUDY

Accountability is an important concept throughout the nation at this time. Since Florida is one of the early states in exploring and applying accountability procedures, an evaluation of the educational soundness of its plans and implementation should be of interest not only within the state but to a much broader audience. Hence, this panel was happy to accept the invitation of the Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and the National Education Association to undertake such an evaluation.

While these organizations have secured our services and supported our work, we have retained complete independence in writing, editing, and releasing this report. A copy of the Memorandum of Agreement is included in the Appendix. This report thus represents our judgments and not necessarily those of the two organizations.

In conducting this study we gathered, received, and discussed an extensive amount of information about the Florida accountability system, particularly the Minimum Competency Testing Program. We heard more than 25 hours of direct testimony presented by teachers, administrators, parents, and representatives of civic and professional organizations. We received and studied specially prepared written testimony. We discussed at length the information we obtained and jointly prepared this report. Our efforts were unified by a common view of the importance of educational accountability and the great need to improve education in order to meet the increasing demands and expectations for it.

This report is the unanimous statement of our conclusions. We hope that it will be useful to citizens, state and local board members, legislators, and educators who seek to shape the accountability program as a means of improving education. Our purpose will have been served if this report stimulates thoughtful discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of the present state accountability system and results in continuing improvement in it.

COMMENTS ON THE ACT

The Educational Accountability Act of 1976 states:

> The intent of the Legislature is to:
>
> (a) Provide a system of accountability in education in Florida which guarantees that each student is afforded similar opportunities for educational advancement without regard to geographic differences and varying local economic factors.
>
> (b) Provide information for education decision-makers of the state, district and school levels so that resources may be appropriately allocated and the needs of the system of public education met in a timely manner.
>
> (c) Provide information about costs of educational programs and the differential effectiveness of differing instructional programs so that the educational process may be improved continually.

(d) Guarantee to each student in the Florida system of public education that the system provides instructional programs which meet minimum performance standards comparable with the state's plan for education.

(e) Provide a more thorough analysis of program costs and the degree to which the various districts are meeting the minimum performance standards established by the State Board of Education.

(f) Provide information to the public about the performance of the Florida system of public education in meeting established goals and providing effective, meaningful, and relevant educational experiences designed to give students at least the minimum skills necessary to function and survive in today's society.

These are praiseworthy intentions and they appear to be the result of the basic purpose: *to improve education in the state.* This is a highly important purpose because in Florida, as in all the other states in this nation, and throughout the world, education needs substantial improvement to meet the immense responsibilities now placed upon it by modern industrial nations. These are tasks that education in the past has not been called upon to perform. Until the close of World War II, at least one-fourth of the labor force of the United States and other modern nations were unskilled workers for whom there was employment. With the rapid development of technology since that time, only 5 percent of the U.S. employed labor force is unskilled. Young people without education are generally unemployable.

In the past the schools sorted their students, giving failing grades to those who had difficulty in learning and encouraging those who learned easily. And while most of the other students went on to graduate from high school, those who received low grades soon dropped out and found jobs requiring little education. This practice is no longer acceptable in a technological nation. Those who drop out are largely unemployable and live on welfare funds. Hence, young people are urged to stay in school and the school is expected to find ways of teaching those who do not respond to traditional educational practices. This is a new task for American schools and most of them need assistance in learning how to effectively teach children who in the past have not learned easily. Against this background the panel has studied the Accountability Act, and particularly the Florida Program of Minimum Competency Testing, seeking to evaluate its impact on students, parents, teachers, and the local schools.

The panel applauds not only the intentions of the Act but also the implicit purposes of minimum competency testing, which seeks to raise the prestige of schooling in the state, to give respected meaning to a high school diploma, to direct the attention of local communities to educational achievements of students rather than only to athletics and other extracurricular activities, to stimulate students to learn more, and to encourage parents to work with students to improve their learning. If this program could make a substantial contribution to these purposes without producing significant negative effects, the time and energy spent in its development would be well worth it.

In evaluating the program, the panel sought the experience and judgments of parents, students, teachers, and others regarding its effectiveness in achieving

these desirable purposes. It has also drawn upon the experience and research in other states that are seeking to improve the effectiveness of their schools. From these sources and from its deliberations the panel has reached conclusions that are critical of the strategy adopted in Florida and particularly of several features of the implementation of the program.

THE STRATEGY EMPLOYED

The earlier assessment program developed from the Educational Accountability Act of 1971 had clearly indicated that there were many children in the Florida schools who were not learning much of what the schools are expected to teach. This assessment also identified school districts where there were large concentrations of children having difficulty in learning. Research and experience in other states have shown that the particular problems chiefly influential in the poor performance of children are different in different populations and different kinds of communities. Often the factors are different with different children coming from the same population in the same community. Furthermore, children differ in the assets they have on which effective learning programs can be built. Many teachers have not had experience in identifying individual problems and locating individual assets. In such cases, they need assistance in developing appropriate programs for their students.

For these reasons a strategy likely to be effective could have begun in 1976, providing the needed assistance. The Department of Education could have worked closely with those schools (not districts) in which concentrations of children having difficulties were located. This procedure is in harmony with the recommendation of the Governor's Citizens Committee on Education and the subsequent legislation emphasizing school-based management.

Assisting local schools to develop promising programs of instruction designed to attack the particular problems in each school, and to utilize the assets found in the children having difficulties, is a constructive initial stage. Later, the development of appropriate standards of achievement at the several grade and age levels, including appropriate standards for graduation from high school, could be done more adequately. To ensure consideration of the various interests concerned, the development of standards should actively involve the parents of the school, other interested adults including employers, teachers, and the students. To set standards before programs have been developed and before having any experience as to the levels of achievement attained by these new programs is likely to result in standards that appear too low to stimulate and challenge students who have little difficulty in learning. The standards would appear too high to students having difficulty in learning under the old programs. This would be likely to discourage them from staying in school because they would anticipate the humiliation of receiving a second-class graduation certificate.

A real dilemma is encountered when an educational institution is also responsible for issuing credentials. This is a central problem in a minimum competency testing program. Credentials such as a driver's license or a barber's license are based on a single standard, while multiple standards are used to stimulate learning among students who are varied in their backgrounds and abilities. The standard usually set on a driver's license represents the knowledge and skill thought to be necessary to drive safely. In a school, however, each child needs to work for a

standard that requires putting forth effort to attain it but is reasonably within his or her power to reach. This means that a teacher sets a standard in terms of the student's present attainment requiring him or her to go further but not a standard seemingly so difficult that the student won't try.

This is clearly sensible. In teaching children to make a high jump, the standard to be reached by the child who now jumps 3feet 6 inches is perhaps 3 feet 9 inches, while an appropriate standard to encourage further learning by a child who jumps 4 feet 7 inches would be 4 feet 10 inches. If each child is to be challenged and encouraged to learn, the standards in a typical classroom will be different for different children. The institution of a single competency measure is appropriate for granting a credential but should not become a central practice of schools and teachers whose function is to increase student learning. A single standard will be too easy to stimulate the more advanced learners and will discourage those with great difficulty in learning.

If the school is expected to operate a credentialing system as well as an educational one, teachers, parents, and others concerned with education need to understand the difference and must not diminish their efforts to promote learning because of concerns about credentialing. Apparently, those planning this system did not work out an orientation program for local schools that would help them understand the Minimum Competency Testing Program as being separate from their work of challenging and encouraging each student to learn.

Another weakness of the strategy for improving education in Florida is its almost complete focus on the public schools. Children probably learn more outside the school than within. The home, the religious institutions, the playgrounds, the press, the employment situations, and the other institutions outside the schoolroom furnish experiences that help children learn basic character traits, commitment to social values, respect for authority, habits of work and the like that are essential to productive and constructive living. Research has shown that a very important factor accounting for some school learning problems is a home that does not provide constructive learning experiences. At one time, these homes were largely concentrated among the poor, those with only one adult in the family or those where the parents were uneducated or came from a very different culture.

Now there are increasing numbers of homes that do not furnish many constructive learning experiences because both parents are at work and because television viewing has preempted much of the time parents used to devote to instructing their children. In 1975, 55 percent of the mothers of school-age children were in the labor force as compared with 26 percent in 1960. In many of these homes, no satisfactory arrangements are made for the children. A national sample of children from 10 to 14 years of age was studied by Schramm and Parker. They found that the average child spends 1,500 hours per year viewing television and only 1,100 hours per year in school. The programs most popular with children are largely entertainment, thus distracting them from study and not contributing to habits of putting forth effort to accomplish something significant.

Totalitarian countries provide adult supervision of children throughout their waking hours because the leaders of these countries understand the importance of out-of-school time in shaping the child. We as a nation are committed to preserving for parents the opportunity to guide their own children; but an effective

effort to improve education in Florida, as in other states, must include a serious attempt to alert the public to the need for rebuilding the out-of-school learning situations that were so important in the past.

The school has a significant role to play in educating children. The school can help them to learn to read, to compute, and to write. The school can teach young people to use the great resources of literature, history, science, and other subjects that enable them to go beyond the limits of direct experience with folklore and superstition and to make use of more dependable knowledge. The school can help students develop broad, constructive interests, liberal attitudes, and intellectual skills. But the school has only a portion of the student's time. It must focus on its chief tasks and not spread itself too thin.

Out-of-school learning is also essential. Our society will need to reconstruct a total learning environment for children. This could well be a major part of Florida's strategy. The Legislature could authorize the formation of local community councils to study and report on the adequacy of the total educational environment of the community. The Department of Education could urge and promote the establishment of these community councils and help them call in volunteers to develop needed educational opportunities where home, community, and appropriate employment situations are inadequate. This could be a major part of the initial phase of a strategy for improving education in Florida. It appears to be totally neglected in the present program.

A subsequent phase in an effective strategy would involve each school in the development of appropriate performance standards that would not need to be arbitrary but could then be based on the results of the improved programs. Without the initial phase, the present use of standards appears to some parents, students, and teachers as unfair. The students believe that the rules for graduation were changed without adequate warning. Some parents feel that those in power are trying to deny diplomas to children whose parents have worked hard to keep them in school. Teachers of classes where many children failed to pass the test believe that they are being blamed for conditions which they cannot control. These, parents, children, and teachers are inclined to resist efforts designed to improve the situation because of their resentment and distrust. Had the proposed initial stage been followed, this strategy would be more likely to obtain cooperation from local schools and teachers, and from parents who need to help their children.

In brief, the panel is critical of the strategy adopted for the implementation of the Accountability Act for two chief reasons. First, it failed to support the policy of school-based management adopted earlier by the Legislature; in fact, the strategy set back the implementation of the policy by operating the program from Tallahassee rather than decentralizing the effort. The recent *Consultant's Report Prepared for the Select Joint Committee on Public Schools of the Florida Legislature* warned of this as follows:

> Underlying the recommendations of the Governor's Citizens Committee on Education was the belief that decisions about public schools were being made too far from those people responsible for teaching children—teachers—and too far from those most affected by schools—students. The Citizens Committee felt that many of the problems of public schools (declining achievement on standardized tests, poor

discipline and public dissatisfaction with schools) were related to the explosion of rules and regulations which had increasingly centralized the administration of public education in district and state offices.

The Committee's strategy for improving education in Florida was to reverse the trend toward more centralized administration in public education and to return many decisions regarding the selection of personnel, the development of curriculum, and the use of resources to the school building level. It was believed that decisions made at the school level would be more responsive to the individual needs of children, would be more consistent with the skills and teaching styles of teachers, would more accurately reflect parent and citizen preference, and would be better coordinated. School-based management was the label given this general strategy. . . .

In general, this analysis of school-based management in Florida is a reasonable way of dealing with educational problems in the 1970's. . . .

While this concept is promising, its implementation in Florida has been uneven.[1]

The *Consultant's Report* goes on to recommend:

The Florida Legislature should continue its efforts to make the school building the primary unit of educational management.[2]

The Minimum Competency Testing Program has reinforced the centralization of Florida's educational policy and practice instead of moving toward the decentralization concept adopted by the Legislature.

The second reason for the panel's critical view of the strategy adopted is its failure to focus first on steps likely to bring about the greatest improvement of education in Florida. A more promising alternative was available but not selected.

THE QUALITY OF IMPLEMENTATION

At this time it is too early to appraise the long-term results of the actual implementation of the Accountability Act of 1976 in improving education in Florida, but it is possible to assess the extent of its implementation and some of the effects of the steps taken on students, teachers, parents, and the public. The Act reads in part:

The Commissioner of Education shall implement a program of statewide assessment testing which shall provide for the improvement of the operation and management of the public schools. . . .[Chapter 229.57, p. 20]

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[1] *Consultant's Report*, pp. 5-6.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

> Beginning with the 1978-79 school year each district school board shall establish standards for graduation from its secondary schools. Such standards shall include, but not be limited to, mastery of the basic skills and satisfactory performance in functional literacy as determined by the State Board of Education. [Chapter 232.245, p. 79]

The Act also provides that districts shall award certificates of attendance as well as differential diplomas, depending upon the achievement levels of high school seniors.

In the statewide program resulting from this legislation, fully effective implementation requires that all the essential actors (a) understand the intentions of the plan, (b) believe that the program offers a constructive way for them to utilize their talents, (c) know what is expected of them, and (d) can and do perform their roles. Note that the program requires actions by students, teachers, parents, principals, district administrators, and Department of Education personnel. All of these persons have responsibilities, most of which cannot be carried out without understanding, belief, and ability to perform their various roles. The panel sought information and testimony regarding implementation in these terms.

In response to this legislation the State Department of Education instituted the Florida Statewide Tests of Basic Skills in grades 3, 5, 8, and 11, and the controversial Eleventh Grade Test of Functional Literacy. It is worthy of note that while testing was specified as the method for assessing basic skills, the method for evaluating functional literacy was not mentioned in the legislation.

As the panel listened to the testimony from parents and teachers and reviewed the steps taken thus far, several serious defects in implementation were identified. They appear to be largely the effects of rushing the establishment of the program without considering all the important aspects of it and without developing adequate communication with those chiefly affected by the program. The following sections of this report document these serious defects.

THE TESTS GIVEN STUDENTS IN THE ELEVENTH GRADE

The most consistent criticism made in the several hearings focused on the plight of students nearing completion of their high school education. The question raised again and again was, "Why should the present eleventh-grade class be punished by being required to meet new standards that had not been requirements before? Why did the program not concentrate first on assuring educational achievement in the early grades?" The critics frequently pointed out that the new Functional Literacy Test included items not commonly taught in schools. Furthermore, testimony by officials from the State Department of Education indicated that the Functional Literacy Test was field-tested only in five Florida counties, and the criteria utilized in the selection of these field-test sites appears strikingly vague. The major question in this regard is, "Do these counties represent a significant cross-section of the total school population?" A second question is, "What were the results of this field-testing and how were they used to modify the tests and the standards?"

In order to assess the appropriateness of the tests and the associated standards established for all students in the Florida school system, clear answers to the

above questions should be readily available to those who are responsible for program implementation at all levels.

Evidence from testimony indicates that the generally used cut-off score of 70 percent for the demonstration of competency was subjectively derived. Since it is difficult, if not impossible, to defend any one percentage point as the point of mastery of such diverse exercises, it appears that the standard established for a diploma is quite arbitrary, and it was so viewed by some students and parents.

The panel also noted that the program was using a score on a single test as a basis for denying a regular high school diploma. This seemed to overlook the fact that students differ in their reactions to tests, some becoming tense and unable to express themselves under the usual test conditions. The accepted educational practice when making important educational decisions about a child is to obtain and consider evidence from several sources, including grades given by teachers who have had many hours of contact with the student. In this connection, particular examples were cited by parents and teachers where test scores misclassified students as functionally illiterate when there was other evidence to show that the students were both competent in their studies and performing well in their part-time jobs.

Although most of those who testified agreed that educational accountability is a sound concept, many of them pointed out that unnecessary fears and actual injuries could have been avoided had more time been spent in working out an appropriate program of implementation. For example, they stated that students and their parents were not provided adequate warning prior to the administration of the Functional Literacy Test in October 1977. We were told that a postponement of its use until students and teachers are adequately prepared to respond to its new requirements has been requested by several sectors of the educational and legal communities. (See Dade County Board of Education vote to exempt schools from this requirement until 1979-80.)

Concerns of this sort were anticipated at the national level in the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's proposed policy interpretation of Title VI of the U.S. Civil Rights Act of 1964 which dealt with competency tests as a requirement for graduation. A section of that interpretation is pertinent in this case:

> The late imposition of a requirement for graduation [of] passing a competency test limits a student's opportunity to fully participate in the education process, and in Society, because (s)he does not have sufficient time to meet the requirement.

From an ethical standpoint, it is clear that students and their parents are entitled to be advised about such requirements early enough in their school careers in order to prepare for the eventuality of the Functional Literacy Test. It is unfair to expect a student to compensate for years of inadequate teaching and learning in a brief period of months.

Another common criticism of the eleventh-grade testing program is the overemphasis now given in many high schools to elementary reading, arithmetic, and some specific items in the tests to ensure that students can pass them. This has resulted in neglect of high school subjects such as science, history, literature,

music, and the arts. Some of the teachers believed that the law now required them to narrow the curriculum to these minimum competencies at a time when they recognized that science human understanding, good literature, art, and music are subjects of increasing importance. In fact, we were told that many teachers interpreted the emphasis on basic skills to mean that they must devote most of their attention to routine drill. This usually results in a decrease in the individual student's interest in schooling and it diminishes the time that should be devoted to teaching the meaning and application of these skills.

The panel does not believe that the Department of Education intended to narrow the curriculum and to overemphasize routine drill. But the fact that the program is misunderstood by many teachers, students, and parents illustrates the consequence of rushing to implement a new program of this serious nature without communicating fully with those most affected. Once a policy of minimum competency testing had been adopted, the means of effective implementation should have been a matter of great concern and careful planning. From the testimony presented at the hearings we conclude that the implementation has been faulty, particularly in lack of adequate communication, lack of careful consideration of all important effects of such a program, lack of planning to try to reduce or eliminate undesirable effects, and lack of decentralization to the school-building level of decisions that seriously affect teachers, students, and parents.

THE BASIC SKILLS TESTS IN GRADES 3, 5, AND 8

Although most of the sharp criticism of the implementation was directed at the eleventh-grade testing and remediation program, several significant points were made about inadequacies in the program for the lower grades. One common weakness mentioned was the use of such short tests as the sole basis for diagnosing learning difficulties and assigning students to remedial classes. Although we did not have a chance to examine the tests used, we concluded from the descriptions of them that they probably were reliable enough in most cases to identify individual students who were having difficulty in learning but did not reliably sample the student's mastery of each of the large number of specific skills.

The objectives adopted at the Florida State Board of Education for the 1976-77 school year provided a basis for the development of 510 minimum performance standards and skills for grades 3 through 11. In February 1977 a revised collection of standards was approved by the Department of Education's Accountability Task Force and later approved for the 1979-80 school year by the State Board of Education. The panel concluded that a dependable judgment on which of the specific skills the student had mastered or failed to master could not be made on the basis of the test results alone. Furthermore, a useful diagnosis should indicate something of the causal factors in the poor performance to enable a teacher to decide whether the student needs remediation or whether more practice in the content subjects will help him/her master the skills. This is an important decision since remediation to acquire these skills takes considerable time and effort on the part of the student. The failure to work out a defensible, comprehensive plan to help students learn what they have not been learning was attributed to the haste in implementation. Surely Florida educators were aware of the distinction between developmental programs and remedial programs. It is a distinction commonly made by educators and many good comprehensive programs can be found throughout the country.

The present program mislabels a portion of the children and establishes inefficient procedures for remediation. That the program was not fully understood is illustrated by the following example that was brought to our attention.

In one middle school the teachers made it clear that the eighth-grade basic skills test would decide whether a child was to be promoted to the high school. The test was given in October. The test results were mailed to parents in January with a letter explaining that if their child had failed, he or she might be retained in eighth grade if no improvement was shown. In addition, the parents were told the number of standards the student was required to pass and listed the ones passed or failed in the October test. This very specific information led the parents to believe, "This is the knowledge our child is expected to have. If through our efforts and the remedial teaching at the school our child gains this knowledge, he will be promoted to the high school." The idea was clearly pretest, remediation, posttest. Many parents sat down with their children to teach specifics, such as envelope addressing, check writing, and decimals. Unfortunately the "posttest" was the norm-referenced Metropolitan Achievement Test, the items of which are not the same as in the basic skills test. A cut-off score to determine if the remediation had been successful was established at two and one-half years below grade level. Clearly there was little correlation between the pre- and posttests and the parents' efforts. Although those efforts were beneficial in many respects, they had nothing to do with the final outcome, and many parents felt that their children were unjustly punished when not promoted.

Since the intent of the Accountability Act of 1976 is to improve education in Florida, diagnosis and remediation are essential parts of its implementation. The purpose is not primarily to test students and identify failures but to help all students to learn. Hence, the way in which each school responds to the testing program is of critical importance. Testimony presented to the panel indicated a very wide range of interpretations. Obviously the schools needed help in gaining a clear understanding of how to use the test results and how to plan an effective program of remediation. Those who testified said that they did not get this help.

A variety of programs can be a positive feature if each one has been developed in light of the needs of students in the particular school and of the resources that are available. However, those who testified asserted that programs were established without considering local needs and resources and without assistance from the Department of Education. In one large county, every student who failed the test was put into an 18-week remedial course for the second semester. One school offered remediation only before or after school hours, thus depriving many children of the opportunity because they could not come at those times.

Summer schools have been established in various areas of the state with special funds, but they are limited to students who possibly could be promoted to the next grade level or could go to middle or junior high school one year early. This eliminates summer school for students who are far behind and need much remedial instruction. Yet they are the ones most in need of help if they are to pass the basic skills test at the various levels and finally the Functional Literacy Test in order to be granted a regular high school diploma. Several persons testified that the time available in the summer was a good time for remedial programs for those most in need. They suggested that part of the remedial funds should be allocated for this purpose.

One important part of a developmental educational program that greatly reduces the need for remediation is a pupil progression plan that is well understood and accepted by the teachers, pupils, and parents concerned and is both practicable and manageable. The present implementation requires pupil progression plans, but we were told that there was great confusion in their development. Most were not well understood by or acceptable to many of those involved, and many plans were unmanageable because of the amount of record keeping and other paperwork which seemed to distract teachers from instructional activities. Some used norm-referenced test scores as the steps in the progression plan. This provides no real basis for progression. Few plans, we were told, were based on a clear notion of gradual steps for the student to take in sequence in mastering the skill, the concept, and the knowledge. Apparently, because of lack of time or failure to recognize the importance of the progression plans to the whole program, the Department of Education had not arranged for technical assistance on this novel development. Several teachers and administrators testified that when they requested advice or interpretations from the Department, the responses were in conflict and changed from time to time.

Some of these criticisms of lack of assistance in developing helpful educational programs have recently been met through the publication of two manuals: *Florida's Functional Literacy Program: Teaching Units in Mathematics,* and *Florida's Functional Literacy Program: Teaching Reading Through Content Areas.* These manuals focus on developmental instruction rather than remediation, a distinction that needs to be recognized and used more often in working out educational programs for students having difficulty in learning. It is unfortunate that manuals like these were not available before schools were designing programs.

From the testimony we received, student absenteeism is a common factor that accounts for a good deal of low achievement. Many schools need help in reducing absenteeism. The experience of schools in various parts of the country in improving attendance records indicates that something can be done. This is another area where technical assistance from the state appears to be needed.

The most important part of the Accountability Act is the development of school programs that help students to learn more. This, the panel believes, should have been the first consideration in implementation. It is only beginning to get serious attention. This should become the major effort of the total program.

MINORITY ISSUES

Perhaps the most emotion encountered by the panel during the hearings was that which focused on the failure of a large percentage of Black eleventh-graders on the Functional Literacy Test. One official of the State Department of Education estimated that the failure rate among Black students would eventually exceed 75 percent of those taking the test. He said that this state of affairs did not come as a surprise to him since he expected in all cases a high failure rate among Blacks. However, the panel was informed that the rate was significantly higher than anticipated. The state testing director suggested that Blacks traditionally score lower than Whites on achievement tests and the Florida Literacy Test was not expected to provide an exceptional case.

The existence of cultural bias in the test items was emphatically denied by the chief administrative officer of the Department of Education. He suggested, however, that many of these students did not realize the test was important and did not take it seriously enough. He also stated that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds tended not to perform as well as students from families of higher socioeconomic levels.

The panel considers these explanations as approaching the highest form of the unfortunate practice of *"blaming the victim."* If it was known by those responsible for the development and field-testing of the Functional Literacy Test that low socioeconomic status is highly correlated with low test performance, then why were the children who fall into this category exposed to an assessment experience known to be one on which they could not perform successfully? It appears as if the current class of eleventh-graders who are Black and poor were sacrificed for the purpose of rapid implementation of the functional literacy segment of the Accountability Act. It is evident that there was little active concern for the appropriateness of the testing program for a large segment of the school population (the Black and poor).

Undoubtedly, factors associated with low socioeconomic status contribute to the low test performance of children from these backgrounds. But seldom if ever are these socially related factors taken into account by the people who develop and generate mass educational programs. This appears to have been the case in planning for implementation of the Florida program.

Whether or not the tests used in the assessment are culturally biased is not the central issue in this matter. Tests can be modified to suit whatever purpose the test developer desires. The critical issue is whether short-term remediation programs can be effective in providing to those poor Black children the knowledge and skills that the schools have not successfully imparted over the last eleven years.

The implementation of the Accountability Act should have taken into account the special problems of minority children and should have worked out a procedure for helping them learn more adequately before subjecting them to the humiliation of being labeled "functional illiterates."

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING NEEDS

The effects of the Florida statewide testing on students with special learning needs have generated a great deal of concern. Testimony provided to the panel stated that many of the special education youngsters were tested with the same tests as those given to other students. These individuals—the specific learning disabled (SLD), emotionally handicapped (EH), and others—could not be expected to perform well in that situation. Fortunately, the State Department of Education has stated that this was an oversight and legislation has been proposed to allow for specially devised tests for the different exceptionalities. We understand that programs for two of these have already been approved. The problem illustrates again the consequences of haste. The panel hopes that students with special learning needs will henceforth be given help before they are subjected to another uncomfortable experience.

There is considerable evidence that special education children and some others do not do well on paper-and-pencil tests, either because of the pressure or because of the specific handicap. Education officials and the legislature should be sensitive to these issues, following the logic that local personnel qualified in the specialized areas could made professional educational decisions on a case-by-case basis.

This policy should be followed for any students who demonstrate test-taking problems which could cause them to be misclassified as a result of such testing.

TEACHER EVALUATION

One serious potential abuse that is emerging as a result of the Florida Accountability Act is the use of students' scores on the basic skills and functional literacy tests as the major criterion for evaluating a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. Evaluating teachers on the basis of a single factor is clearly unsound, as test results are products of many nonschool and school factors not controlled by teachers. Among the factors beyond the teacher's control are such matters as a student's socioeconomic level; background of experience; his or her motivation to learn, often reflecting family attitude toward education; his or her attendance pattern; and his or her physical, emotional, and mental readiness for participating in any learning task. Even within the school, teachers do not control such factors as class size, resources and materials, and technical assistance.

At this time the panel has not discovered any actual cases of teachers being discharged as a result of the statewide testing program. However, there has been testimony indicating "blame-fixing" and "finger-pointing." Teachers are at the bottom end of the accountability hierarchy, and many feel anxious and threatened by this possible use of the tests. The panel has heard testimony that in certain schools, after test scores have been reported, teachers have been called in by the administration for conferences and possible reprimands. Administrators have also posted results of tests in the teacher lounges and other places.

What effect will this type of evaluation have upon teachers of slower learning and learning disabled students? What teacher, regardless of how capable she/he may be, would want to teach these students and be classified as a "poor" teacher when test results are published?

Indicating the potential injury is the fact that at this time there is a bill in the Florida Legislature (SB56, Zinkel) which provides that, for teachers, failure to teach students to reach minimum performance on basic skills is grounds for dismissal, suspension, or return to annual contract, and failure to identify teaching deficiencies is cause for action against a principal or supervisor.

One superintendent of schools has been quoted in the newspaper as saying that "the classroom-by-classroom breakdown of functional literacy and basic skills test results could be used to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers." Another county administrator stated during the public hearings that teachers are doing the best job they can, but the way accountability is being interpreted is making teachers the scapegoats. Newspapers are also making statements about teacher competence and laying blame. Articles of this kind may lead parents and the public to further distrust teachers and public education in general.

The panel urges that Department of Education officials and county administrators take a strong position against this detrimental and demoralizing use of standardized tests. This is not to say that teachers should not be evaluated—but that evaluation should be done fairly on a variety of valid criteria. The fact that these steps have not already been taken seems to the panel another illustration of hasty implementation without careful planning that considers possible negative effects of the program and devises ways of minimizing them.

IN SUMMARY

The panel's evaluation of the educational soundness and implementation of the Florida Accountability Act is that its purpose is praiseworthy. Education in Florida, as in all the states, needs improvement if the great expectations and the increasing demands for it are to be met. However, the strategy adopted in the statewide Minimum Competency Testing Program, with its mandatory standards for receiving a regular high school diploma, is seriously faulty. It once more takes primary responsibility out of the hands of the local school when the Legislature has adopted a policy of moving toward school-based management. A strategy likely to be more effective in improving education in Florida would have helped schools to identify their particular problems and assisted each school in developing educational programs designed to attack serious problems of that school. Standards and requirements for promotion and graduation could then be developed based on reasonable expectations. Furthermore, an essential step for significant improvements in education in Florida is to reconstruct the eroding educational environment outside the school. Until the communities are aroused to do their part in the education of children and youth, many young people will fail to become constructive and responsible persons. Arousing the public to assume again the out-of-school educational responsibility should have been taken as an early step in the accountability program.

The panel also finds the implementation faulty. It appears that the inadequacies are due largely to excessive haste in instituting the program and failure to make maximum effort to communicate with and involve all those who are responsible for making the program work and those who are seriously affected by it.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The panel believes it is not too late to correct some of the serious deficiencies of the present program. The following steps can be taken to emphasize the improvement of education rather than the punishment and humiliation of students, parents, and teachers who feel that blame is placed on them.

1. The State Department of Education can mobilize assistance to local schools (buildings, not districts) to (a) *identify critical learning problems* in the schools, (b) *identify assets* of the students who are having difficulty in learning, and (c) *develop the programs needed* to attack learning problems by building on the assets identified. The serious problems of learning are not the same in all schools, and the assets of children differ. For this reason local schools need to be helped to solve their problems rather than be given a standard prescription.

2. The State Department of Education can work with local districts as well as civic leaders in the state to arouse concern about the serious erosion of opportunities for constructive learning from out-of-school experiences and to effectively encourage and assist parents, employers, youth organizations, and other interested adults to *begin the rebuilding of the necessary out-of-school educational environment.*

3. The Legislature and the State Department of Education can use the interest generated in this program to move with *all deliberate speed to implement school-based management,* with corresponding decentralization of responsibility and authority and with emphasis upon the development and constructive use of *community advisory groups.*

4. The State Department of Education can develop a much more *effective system for communication with teachers, parents, school administrators, the Legislature, and the general public.* There appears to be no systematic plan for identifying what needs to be communicated about education to these groups and for maintaining two-way communication on all important matters.

5. The State Department of Education can shift its emphasis more sharply from acting to regulate, control, and direct education in the state to *furnishing leadership in the clarification of critical educational issues* and *providing technical assistance to local schools* to help them develop competence in the direction and management of education in their communities. Such technical assistance can be drawn from various sources, including but not limited to staffs of colleges and universities, expertise in local schools, and expertise in the Department of Education itself and in other state agencies.

6. The State Department of Education can provide technical assistance to *encourage and help the schools select and use other methods of assessment* for identifying learning problems, for diagnosis, for evaluating pupil progress, and for appraising programs.

7. The State Department of Education can *utilize matrix sampling* at the state level much the same as the National Assessment of Educational Progress does at the national level. In this way the *cost of assessment can be greatly reduced, other methods of assessing individual achievement can be employed,* and *the state would have an effective means for identifying the types of additional resources needed* to enhance the enterprise of schooling throughout the state.

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT

between the

Evaluation Panel and Florida Teaching Profession-NEA
and the National Education Association

Rationale

The Legislature's concern for its role in development of policy and the allocation of resources for public education in Florida led to the creation of the Accountability Act of 1971. Recent revisions of the Act have focused on the assessment of student competencies. The educational soundness of the Act and the effects of its implementation on students, the public, and the teaching profession warrant closer examination. To conduct this examination, a panel of experts has been engaged to evaluate Florida's assessment program.

Charge to the Panel

The panel is charged by Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and the National Education Association to evaluate the educational soundness and the implementation of the Florida Accountability Act and to present to the sponsors a report of its findings. The purpose of the evaluation and report is to determine if such legislative goals and their implementation have improved education in Florida and what effects such policies have had on students, the public, and the profession. The panel's investigation is to be based on the following:

1. Issues to be Addressed in the Evaluation

The report will analyze the effects of decisions made as a result of the assessment component of the Accountability Program. In particular, decisions affecting students, parents, and teachers will be highlighted.

Topics to be investigated in examining the issue include:

a. selection and use of the objectives

b. quality of planning in the Florida Accountability Program including the range of involvement of appropriate groups in the selection of objectives and the development and use of the tests

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c. appropriateness of the tests as they relate to statewide expectations for quality schools in Florida

d. disparate effects of the assessment program on differing student populations (including but not limited to minorities, learning disabled, physically handicapped, gifted and talented, urban/suburban/rural populations)

e. actual and planned use of test scores in personnel and program evaluation

f. costs of the assessment program with particular attention to time spent by students, teachers, and other school personnel in its implementation.

2. Access to Data

It is understood that the Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and the National Education Association staffs will facilitate for the panel acquisition of any and all data and reports required by the panel to do the job. This, of course, is restricted to those data and reports that are now available to the Florida Department of Education regarding Florida accountability. Other relevant data will be collected by the panel as described in section three below.

3. Procedures

The panel will have control over the evaluation process necessary to complete the charge. The panel agrees to implement the following processes.

Public hearings will be conducted by the panel with groups or individuals affected by the accountability program. When requested, private interviews may be held. The panel will also review documents made available to it by the Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and the National Education Association, the Florida Department of Education, and others. The panel will conduct three (3) hearings to obtain information concerning issues identified by the panel in the course of interviewing various client groups and studying various documents.

The panel requests that a representative(s) of the Florida Department of Education be present at each of the three (3) hearings. Other organizations are encouraged to have representatives present at all hearings. The panel also requests that invitations be extended by the sponsors to all groups and individuals affected by the accountability program to provide testimony at the hearings.

4. Audiences

   a. The Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and the the National Education Association

   b. Decision-makers in Florida's educational system (Legislature, State Board of Education, Board of Regents, Florida Department of Education)

   c. The public, the media, and special interest groups

   d. Consumers, parents, students, institutions of higher education

   e. Specialists (especially in the area of educational management)

   f. Professional organizations

5. The Report

   a. The Format

      The following items are desirable ingredients for the panel's final report:

      1. citation of the agreements between the panel and Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and the National Education Association

      2. presentation of the major findings including their recommendations for change and further study

      3. presentation of minority opinions, if any.

b. Report/Editing

The panel will be solely responsible for developing and editing its final report. Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and/or the National Education Association may write and disseminate any separate statement (such as an endorsement, a rebuttal, or a commentary). It is understood that the panel's report is to be as short and direct as possible and to be designed to communicate with the audiences designated for the report.

c. Delivery Schedule

The panel is to deliver an oral report on April 28 and its final written report no later than May 10, 1978.

d. Dissemination

Upon completion of the evaluation, the panel will submit the written report to the sponsors. Five days following the submission the panel may release the report to all other target audiences described in section four. The panel's report will imply no endorsement of the sponsors. Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and the National Education Association may choose to endorse or not endorse the report depending on their judgment. Should Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and the National Education Association decide to disseminate their own document describing the report, their document will be identified as their own and not that of the committee. Only the committee's final report as edited by the committee will be distributed with the names of the committee on it.

6. Resources to Support the Study

Sufficient resources will be made available by Florida Teaching Profession-NEA and the National Education Association to the panel to support no more than 14 days of work per panelist, secretarial support, materials and equipment requirements (for example, tape recorders for taping the hearings).

Members of Panel:

Ralph Tyler

Steven Lapan

Judy Moore

Wendell Rivers

Donna Skibo

Sponsors:

Robert M. McClure
National Education Association

Ruby E. King
Florida Teaching Profession-NEA

Appendix B

VITAE

Ralph W. Tyler, panel chairperson, is senior consultant with Science Research Associates, Inc. Dr. Tyler taught in high school and at several universities before going to the University of Chicago where during a 15-year tenure (1938-53) he was chairman of the Department of Education, University examiner, and dean of the Division of Social Science. He was founding director of the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, 1953-67. Often called the "Father of the National Assessment of Educational Progress," Dr. Tyler was chairperson of the Exploratory Committee that designed the NAEP. He has also been chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the American College Testing Program and a member of numerous other organizations related to student testing, including the National Council on Research in Measurement of Education and the Psychometric Society. His honors include the Distinguished Research Award of the American Educational Research Association and Phi Delta Kappa; the Distinguished Service Award from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; and the Rosenberger Medal. Dr. Tyler has served several Presidents of the United States as an advisor on labor evaluation policies.

Stephen D. Lapan, associate professor and student teacher supervisor, Teacher Centers Program, Northeastern Illinois University, and acting coordinator of the M.Ed. Program in Language Arts. B.A., social science education, Parsons College; M.Ed., special education, University of Illinois; Ph.D., educational psychology, University of Connecticut. Dr. Lapan has been a classroom teacher, learning center administrator, assistant director of the Illinois Department for Gifted Children, educational specialist with the Statewide Gifted Evaluation Project at the University of Illinois, and coordinator of the Suburban Communities Teacher Education Program at Northeastern. He was awarded grants from the Connecticut Department of Education to study the needs of seriously handicapped children (1971-72) and from the Illinois Office of Education to evaluate the DIAL Preschool Screening Test for the Learning Disabled (1973). He is co-author with Ernest R. House of *Survival in the Classroom* (1978) and has written or co-authored numerous evaluation and technical reports and research papers relating to education of exceptional children and curriculum evaluation. He is a member of the Council for Exceptional Children, American Educational Research Association, Teachers Association for the Gifted, and Phi Delta Kappa.

Judith C. Moore, kindergarten-first grade teacher, Red Bug Elementary School, Maitland, Florida. B.A., elementary and early childhood education, Stetson University; M.Ed., reading, Rollins College. An elementary teacher since 1966, Mrs. Moore has also taught teacher-parent education classes at Seminole Community College. She just recently served as chairperson of the County Report Card Committee which developed an elementary reporting system to reflect new pupil progression policy and the accountability law, and was a member of the superintendent's Curriculum Advisory Committee. At the state level she was a member of the Florida Department of Education committee to study state standards and determine what skills should be considered "basic," and presently is serving a four-year term as a member of the State Council on Elementary Education. Mrs.

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Moore is active in governance of the Seminole Education Association and has been involved in legislative and women's leadership training for the Florida Teaching Profession-NEA. She has been a state delegate to the NEA Representative Assembly since 1975. Mrs. Moore and her husband, William Moore, have three daughters.

L. Wendell Rivers, director of the Mental Health Specialists Program and professor of community medicine, St. Louis University; and associate professor of psychology, Washington University, St. Louis. B.S., social and research psychology, M.A., neurophysiology and child development, Washington University; Ph.D., clinical child psychology, St. Louis University; training in interviewing techniques, vocational test administration, and job placement, Missouri Division of Employment Training Program for Vocational Counseling. Dr. Rivers has served as director of the Youth Job Training Program, U.S. Department of Labor, Missouri Division of Employment Security; chairman of the Department of Behavioral Sciences, Meramec Community College in Kirkwood, Mo.; and a consultant and instructor for the St. Louis Police Academy. He has been an examiner for the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools since 1970. Dr. Rivers is also a member of the Special Training Review Committee, Experimental and Special Training Branch, National Institute of Mental Health, and of several psychologist organizations, and is the author of two psychology textbooks and numerous research papers and articles for professional journals.

Donna B. Skibo, mathematics teacher, Boca Ciega High School, St. Petersburg, Florida; and a member of the Principal's Advisory Committee. While a freshman at St. Petersburg junior college, Mrs. Skibo was awarded a three-year Florida State Teachers Scholarship and subsequently received her bachelor's degree from the University of South Florida. She is presently completing a master's degree program in mathematics education. Active in local association work, she is the Pinellas Classroom Teachers Association Faculty Representative chairperson at BC High School and has served as a poll watcher in collective bargaining elections. She has been a sponsor of Mu Alpha Theta (national mathematics honor society), coached local college-bowl type television programs, and served as a teacher trainer in reading. Mrs. Skibo is also a member of the Florida Teaching Profession-NEA, the National Education Association, National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and Pi Mu Epsilon (honorary mathematical society). She and her husband, Hartley V. Skibo, have two sons.